

# **Petition to UN seeks repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws: Law allegedly used to settle scores**

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A petition calling for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which impose the death sentence on a person found desecrating the Qur'an, has been delivered to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The signatories say the law is used to settle scores with non-Muslims and in recent times has been exploited to incite hatred and attacks against Pakistan's minority Christian community.

"These laws condemn to death any person who desecrates the Holy Qur'an," said the petition, which bears more than 9,000 signatures. "The testimony of just one Muslim is sufficient to bring charges against the alleged culprit, who is then immediately put in jail, where he often remains for months or years pending trial."

Rory Mungoven, head of the Asia-Pacific unit of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, received the petition October 14 from a delegation of the London- and Pakistan-based Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement.

"Almost all charges brought under these laws are fabricated or false, and made to settle private scores," said Nasir Saeed, chair of the legal aid center.

Mungoven said the petition given to him would enable the UN to raise the issue in meetings with the government of Pakistan.

Blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad is punishable by death under the law of Pakistan, although nobody has been executed for it. Courts have acquitted those accused of blasphemy in more than 100 cases after overruling lower tribunals. However, lawyers have said that some non-Muslims they have defended, including Christians, were killed while awaiting trial. *-Religion News Service, Ecumenical News*

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